AGENDA ITEM #7

January 25, 2001

To: Delta Protection Commission

From: Lori Clamurro, Delta Protection Commission Staff

Subject: Update on the Grassland Bypass Project

Background on the Grassland Bypass Project

The Grassland Bypass Project was approved in 1995, when the Bureau of Reclamation signed a Use Agreement with the San Luis and Delta-Mendota Water Authority allowing the northern 28-mile portion of the San Luis Drain to be re-opened for a trial period. The purpose of the Grassland Bypass Project is to route agricultural drain water from the Grassland Drainage Area in the western San Joaquin Valley around State and federal wildlife habitat areas in Mud and Salt Sloughs. The drain water that used to flow through these areas now flows into the existing portion of the San Luis Drain, where it is released into Mud Slough downstream of the habitat areas. From there, it flows into the San Joaquin River and north into the Delta. The current Use Agreement for this project expires in September 2001.

Current Status of the Grassland Bypass Project

The Grassland Bypass Project, as it is being implemented under the 1995 Use Agreement, has been successful at meeting the water quality objectives established by the Regional Water Quality Control Board. Under this program, in an effort to continue decreasing the salts and other constituents entering the San Joaquin River, the Bureau of Reclamation and the San Luis and Delta-Mendota Water Authority are proposing to continue the Grassland Bypass Project through 2009.

A Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (DEIS/EIR) for continuation of the Grassland Bypass Project was released for review and comment on December 19, 2000. Comments on the DEIS/EIR should be submitted to Michael Delamore at the Bureau of Reclamation, 1243 N Street, Fresno, CA 93721-1813 by February 27, 2001. If Commissioners would like to obtain a copy of the Grassland Bypass Project DEIS/EIR, please contact Mr. Delamore at (559) 487-5039. There will also be public meetings on the DEIS/EIR; one public meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, February 7, 2001 at the Best Western Expo Inn in Sacramento.

The proposed action described in the DEIS/EIR includes:

- New 2001 Use Agreement for the San Luis Drain

The new Use Agreement requires continuing selenium load reductions to meet implementation dates for water quality objectives (the applicable selenium load limit for 2006, based on current applicable total maximum monthly load [TMML] is 3,087 pounds, compared to the existing load value under the 1995 Use Agreement, 5,661 pounds, for Water Year 2001). The new Use Agreement would include an updated compliance monitoring plan, the revised selenium load limits, and a new Waste Discharge Requirement from the Regional Water Quality Control Board.

- Addition of approximately 1,100 acres to the Grassland Drainage Area

  1,100 acres of unincorporated land immediately adjacent to the Grassland Drainage Area, south of the San Luis Drain and east of the Grassland Bypass Channel, would be included in the Grassland Drainage Area.

- In-Valley Treatment and Drainage Reuse

  The In-Valley Treatment/Drainage Reuse element would be implemented on up to 6,200 acres of land within the Grassland Drainage Area in phases, and it is anticipated that each phase would significantly reduce the quantity of drain water discharged to the San Joaquin River. This element would dedicate specific lands for the irrigation of salt-tolerant crops with subsurface drain water, treat the concentrated drain water to remove salt, selenium, and boron, and dispose of the removed salts "in-valley" to prevent them from discharging to the San Joaquin River. It would be implemented in three phases:

  Phase 1: Purchase of land and planting to salt-tolerant crops, by 2003 – After the land is purchased from willing sellers, salt-tolerant crops would be planted for irrigation with the salty Grassland Drainage Area drain water.

  Phase 2: Installation of subsurface drainage and collection systems, initial treatment system, by 2007 – Subsurface drainage systems would need to be installed so the land can be leached to maintain salt balance. The salt and other constituents would be collected in the water coming out of the systems, and the salt would be deposited in waste units approved by the Regional Water Quality Control Board and not discharged into the San Joaquin River.

  Phase 3: Completion of construction of treatment removal and salt disposal systems, by 2009 – The initial treatment systems (Phase II) would be expanded, and new treatment facilities would be constructed, to provide for maximum improvement to water quality in the San Joaquin River and to ultimately meet future water quality objectives.

- Other drainage management actions to meet water quality objectives and load limits.

There are various management actions listed in the DEIS/EIR which would occur with implementation of the proposed action. Some actions include installation of drainage recycling systems to mix subsurface drain water with irrigation supplies, continuation of current voluntary land retirement policies (established in the *Long Term Drainage Management Plan for the Grassland Drainage Area*), a land management program to utilize subsurface drainage on salt-tolerant crops, and an economic incentive program including tiered water pricing and tradable loads.